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SUBJECT: WOLFF-FASSI FIHRI MEETING AND SUBSEQUENT CONTACTS

Classified By: Classified by Amb. Alex D. Wolff. E.O 12958. Reasons 1.4
(B&D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: April 11 was a day of intense activity on the Moroccan Western Sahara initiative. In a meeting with Ambassador Wolff, MFA Minister Delegate Fassi Fihri requested US assistance in helping solidify Moroccan public and political party opinion in support of this initiative by convincing the SYG to include a positive reference to it in his forthcoming report in conjunction with the next MINURSO extension and to append its text to the report as an annex. Ambassador Wolff agreed to work on both issues, but urged Fassi Fihri to prepare to send the text to the President of the Security Council for distribution before the SYG's report in the event that efforts to get it appended to that report did not succeed. Wolff and Fassi Fihri reviewed the likely positions of the various Council members; Wolff noted that the submission of a Polisario proposal could well complicate matters both with the UN Secretariat, which would want to equate the two plans, and with those members of the Council most committed to the Baker approach. Wolff praised the work that Morocco had done to date with many Council members, urged that it continue, recommended additional efforts with states outside the Council, suggested that the Moroccans include the SYG's envoy for the Western Sahara in their contacts, since he was responsible for producing the first draft of the SYG's report and it would be best for a positive reference to the Moroccan initiative to be included from the beginning, and cited the importance of mounting an intensive media campaign in support of Morocco's moves. Fassi Fihri agreed to take these steps and expressed the belief that Morocco already enjoyed the support of Qatar, the EU countries, Ghana, the Congo, and Indonesia, that it appeared to have convinced Russia to be supportive, but that it had achieved less success with China.

12. (C) SUMMARY CONTINUEUD: Since this meeting, the French PermRep has suggested to Ambassador Wolff that we convince the SYG to transmit the Moroccan text to the President of the Security Council under a positive cover note. Ambassadors Wolff and Sanders have pursued the Moroccan requests and the French suggestion with the SYG, his Deputy Chief of Staff, and other senior members of the Secretariat. The Deputy Chief of Staff reported that the request for a positive reference in the SYG's report was under active consideration and that he would look into having the SYG transmit the report under a positive cover note. He volunteered that the existence of a separate proposal from the Polisario would have to be considered; Wolff rejoined that the two documents were different -- one new, the other a rehash of old positions -- and that the SYG should find a way to address this. Ambassador Wolff has briefed Fassi Fihri on these contacts and urged him to have King Mohammed VI call the SYG to reinforce the importance of the Moroccan requests. We will continue to press the SYG and the Secretariat. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (U) Ambassador Wolff, accompanied by Ambassador Sanders, Ambassador (ret.) Chris Ross, and USUN/POL officer Ang, met with a Moroccan delegation led by MFA Minister Delegate Taleb El Fassi Fihri and hosted by Moroccan PermRep El Mostapha Sahel, for one hour April 11.

¶4. (C) Fassi Fihri did all the talking on the Moroccan side, opening with a long exposition on Morocco's attempts to normalize relations with Algeria, which Algeria rebuffed pending resolution of the Western Sahara conflict, its subsequent unsuccessful attempts to talk directly to the Polisario, and its ultimate resort to "a domestic approach to the self-determination principle" which, he stated would ultimately be put to a referendum. He expressed regret that Morocco had been denied a chance to present "the new Morocco" to the Polisario in the process.

¶5. (C) Fassi Fihri then moved to recent developments on the issue; King Mohammad VI had agreed to the word changes proposed by U/S Burns, and Ambassador Sahel had presented the revised Moroccan proposal to SYG Ban this morning. However, the Moroccan delegation was concerned about what it had heard from U/SYG Guehenno and others in the UN Secretariat regarding the difficulty of annexing the Moroccan proposal to the SYG's impending report in conjunction with consideration of another extension of MINURSO. UN interlocutors had posed both technical and political issues, notably that by annexing the Moroccan proposal the report would appear to endorse it.

¶6. (C) This, Fassi Fihri said, was not what Morocco was looking for. It merely wanted some kind of positive recognition from the international community and the U.S. to validate the King's decision to work on this proposal in the eyes of Moroccan public and party opinion. It was after all, "a credible, open-minded, lawful, and constructive proposal open to negotiation," even though the Algerian government had termed it "unilateral and unlawful" and had darkly predicted that it would create "a new Darfur."

¶7. (C) Fassi Fihri continued that, last night, the Moroccan delegation had heard that the Polisario Front had put something forward. It was nothing new -- the Polisario stated that it was ready to negotiate the implementation of the Baker Plan. And it said negative things about Morocco. (To buttress his point, Fassi Fihri handed Ambassador Wolff the French text of the Polisario proposal.) This approach, he said, looked to the past, while Morocco was looking to the future, to the best possible Maghrib, and to the well being of the Sahrawis, two-thirds of whom are happy and one-third of whom need to be reconciled.

¶8. (C) Fassi Fihri then requested US assistance with the SYG to ensure that Morocco's proposal was handled in a way that would satisfy public and party opinion in Morocco and the Sahrawis in the south that making this "important effort" had been worthwhile. Assuming the correct handling by the SYG, the members of the Security Council could then welcome his report and agree that a two-month extension of MINURSO was reasonable, as the Department had told Fassi Fihri, to exploit the current momentum and push for the opening of negotiations between Morocco and the Polisario. U/S Burns had made clear that, if in two months the Polisario was still refusing to be constructive, the USG would draw the conclusion that Morocco's plan was the best solution.

¶9. (C) Fassi Fihri repeated that it was very important to have the SYG put Morocco's initiative into his report to the Council. Then, France, Spain, the UK, and the US could cooperate to create an international coalition within the Council in support. While Morocco knew that Saudi Arabia and Panama were elsewhere on the issue, Qatar and the EU countries (Belgium) were supportive. Ghana and the Congo were also supportive, albeit more discreetly; they preferred to follow the lead of the US and others on this issue.

¶10. (C) Ambassador Wolff thanked Fassi Fihri for his clear and cogent presentation. He then reviewed the operational

steps that were required:. USUN would follow up with the SYG's office on his report from two angles -- making the Moroccan proposal an annex and ensuring positive treatment of the proposal in the body of the report. He noted that we would see what could be done on both issues. We were agreed that some acknowledgment of Morocco's initiative was needed, and we hoped it would be positive. Beyond the text of the SYG's report itself, however, the Moroccan delegation should remember that it has the right to send its proposal to the President of the Security Council for transmission to the members. This being the case, getting the proposal to Council members would not be a problem, but the Moroccans should be prepared for that contingency.

¶11. (C) Turning to attitudes among the Council members, Ambassador Wolff urged the Moroccans not to be too rosy or too dark in their assessment. That said, the makeup of the Council was problematic. Guehenno's reaction was indicative in this regard. Within the UN Secretariat and among certain members of the Council, there was significant investment in the Baker approach, and getting a different approach blessed would not be easy. In this regard, Morocco's openness to discussions with the Polisario without preconditions would help the USG work with Council members. Ambassador Wolff confirmed that the time frame for the extension of MINURSO that we would propose would be two months. We would see whether the Polisario engaged with Morocco during that period and then draw our conclusions. While we had not yet seen the Polisario's plan, the conclusion we drew from press reports is the same as Morocco's. Nonetheless, its mere existence would complicate matters with the UN Secretariat, which would want to equate the two plans, especially given the commitment of some Security Council members to the Baker approach.

¶12. (C) Ambassador Wolff stressed that, in raising these concerns, he was not being reticent, but merely realistic. The Secretariat would be looking for the easiest way out, but we would confront this posture. As for the members of the Council, South Africa's position was well known, and it carried weight among the other members. Morocco's discussions with Ghana and the Congo were encouraging. If other undecided members saw other Africans supporting Morocco's initiative, South Africa's influence could be mitigated. Indonesia and Panama could be on the fence; what was Morocco's understanding of Indonesia's position? Fassi Fihri replied that they had given Foreign Minister Ben Issa a commitment to be positive. Ambassador Wolff asked about the Russians and Chinese. Fassi Fihri affirmed that Morocco had convinced Russia that it was worthwhile for Morocco to try to create a new dynamic without forcing a choice between Rabat and Algiers. If the Russians felt that there was agreement among Washington, Paris, London, and Madrid, they would not oppose what would be presented as an attempt to create a new

dynamic and open negotiations, not to impose a solution. China, said Fassi Fihri, was more complicated. The Chinese saw the conflict as being very young and suggested that Morocco could wait 100 years, but they did know that Morocco was ready for negotiations.

¶13. (C) Looking beyond the Council, Ambassador Wolff suggested that efforts with the Arab League and others to create a foundation of support would buttress US efforts in this regard. Fassi Fihri noted that all members of the Arab League, other than Syria, Libya, and Mauritania, recognize Morocco's sovereignty over the Western Sahara, but Qadhafi was becoming more neutral and Asad had closed the Polisario's office in Damascus. Ambassador Wolff reiterated the need to be active in building support, because Algeria would be very active on the other side. Morocco could count on US support, and we would work closely with the French in following up immediately with the SYG. Fassi Fihri asked whether the US could get a response from the SYG in the next few hours, and Ambassador Wolff confirmed that we would push for one.

¶14. (C) Ambassador Wolff suggested that, meanwhile, in addition to its previous contacts, the Moroccan delegation should talk to Van Walsum, the SYG's envoy for the Western

Sahara. Fassi Fihri indicated that Ambassador Sahel had already talked to him, but it was not clear where he stood. Ambassador Wolff encouraged the Moroccan delegation to keep its pressure on him, because he is the drafter of the SYG's report and it would be best for him to agree to a positive reference to the Moroccan initiative from the beginning, before the report when to Guehenno and others for clearance.

¶15. (C) Ambassador Wolff reiterated that the Moroccan delegation should be ready to transmit its proposal through a letter to the president of the Security Council on Friday, April 13, if the issue of annexing it to the SYG's report had not been resolved. A positive reference in the report, coupled with transmission to Council members, would give Morocco's initiative the political recognition it needed for domestic purposes. Fassi Fihri cautioned that, by Monday, April 16, Moroccan public opinion would be looking to see whether the SYG's report mentioned the proposal. If it did not, the proposed two-month extension of MINURSO would be seen as pressure on Morocco, not the Polisario.

¶16. (C) Ambassador Wolff raised another interim step -- how to generate international media coverage of Morocco's initiative. This could be done, not necessarily on the basis of the SYG's report, but on the basis of what Council members said. Fassi Fihri agreed that good work in managing public opinion could be done in the coming "many days."

¶17. (C) As the meeting ended, Fassi Fihri noted that the Secretary had asked Algerian Foreign Minister Bedjaoui to

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help get the Polisario to talk to Morocco about its initiative. It remained to be seen whether Bedjaoui would be successful.

¶18. (C) COMMENT: In parallel consultations with the French, who are also pressing the Secretariat for a positive reference to the Moroccan initiative in the SYG's report, Ambassador de la Sabliere suggested that the SYG could also transmit the Moroccan text to the Council, perhaps with a cover note that took a positive tack. After a phone call with the SYG, Ambassador Wolff went over the Moroccan request and French recommendation in detail with Ban's Deputy Chief of Staff, Ambassador Kim. He stressed Morocco's domestic need for a positive reference to the Moroccan initiative in the SYG's upcoming report and mentioned the possibility that the SYG could transmit the Moroccan text to the President of the Security Council with a positive cover note. Kim indicated that the Moroccans had already approached him on including a reference to their initiative in the report and that their request was under consideration. On having the SYG transmit the Moroccan text to the Council with a positive cover note, Kim said that he would look into this possibility, but gave no commitment. He then noted that the Polisario had submitted its own plan and that this would have to be considered. Ambassador Wolff rejoined that the two documents could not be compared -- the Moroccan effort was something new; the Polisario effort merely repeated old positions, and it would not be appropriate to give them equal treatment. He urged Kim to help the SYG find a way to address this difference.

¶19. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: We will continue to press these points with the Secretariat at every opportunity. Ambassador Wolff has just briefed the Fassi Fihri by phone on our efforts and urged that he consider asking King Mohammed V call the SYG to press the importance of a positive welcoming reference to their initiative in the SYG's report both for Morocco and for the negotiating effort. Fassi Fihri wanted to know whether we could guarantee the outcome of such a call. Our sense is that, in the absence of such a guarantee, which is not ours to give, it is unlikely that Fassi Fihri will ask the King's to call. END COMMENT.

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